Paris Politico Regains Hold On L'Express

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PARIS, June 11 — Publisher-politician Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber won a three-week battle today to regain control of the L'Express, France's leading newsweekly.

But the resignation of the 10 top editors and three top administrators at L'Express indicated that Servan-Schreiber's victory might prove pyrrhic.

The editors resigned in protest against Servan-Schreiber's bid to reassert political control over L'Express, a onetime opposition tabloid which since 1964 has been a slick, prosperous newsweekly. Servan-Schreiber, who quit active management of the periodical in 1969 to become secretary general of the Radical Party, had been critical of the magazine's sympathetic approach to the post-DeGaulle government of President Pompidou and Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas.

L'Express had a paid circulation of 509,520 last year.

Among those who resigned today were the magazine's editor in chief, Claude Imbert; its domestic affairs specialist, Georges Suffert; its diplomatic correspondnet, Marc Ullmann; and seven other editors. Also leaving were Olivier Chevrillon, president of the Express Publish Group; Pierre Barret, director general, and Dominique Ferry, controller general.

Chevrillon had attempted to bar Servan-Schreiber's return to power, but was unable to muster sufficient financial support and legal backing to challenge a stockholders' meeting scheduled by Servan-Schreiber for June 24. Servan-Schreiber and two sisters, Brigitte Gros and Christiane Feniot, control 60 per cent of the stock.

It is now expected that the magazine will become more partisan, in anticipation of the parliamentary elections of 1973, which constitute the make-or-brak test for Servan-Schreiber's political career.

Just a year ago, the 47-year-old Servan-Schreiber won a parliamentary seat in a Nancy by-election and was soon promising that he would be prime minister by 1973.

Last September, however, he took a bad drubbing in another by-election from Chaban-Delmas whom he challenged in the prime minister's home constituency of Bordeaux. Since then, Servan-Schreiber has taken a vacation from the Radical Party and turned his attention back to publishing.

As a result of the conflict, the key role at L'Express has now been assumed by Mme. Giroud, one of the last of the original band who made the weekly influential in its struggles to support former Premier Pierre Mendes-France and oppose the colonial war in Algeria.

(Among the original Express stars, the late Francois Mauriac supported De Gaulle and moved over to Le Figaro, while Jean Daniel left to found the competing, and often harder-hitting weekly, Le Nouvel Observateur.)

What remains to be seen is whether a more partisan political line will affect the weekly's circulation and advertising revenues. Much of the advertising in recent months has come from various branches of nationalized industry, such as Air France and Renault autos.